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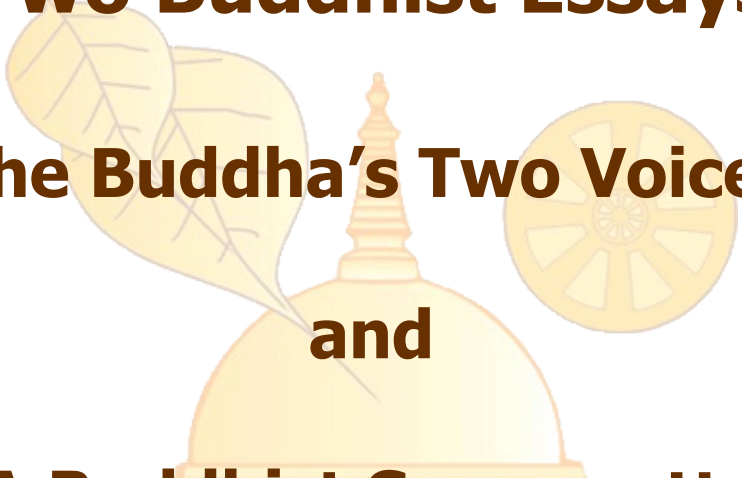
Two Buddhist Essays

The Buddha's Two Voices
&
A Buddhist Sermonette

J. F. Mc Kechnie
(*Bhikkhu Silacara*)



BUDDHIST PUBLICATION SOCIETY



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The Buddha's Two Voices
and
A Buddhist Sermonette

By

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The Buddha's Two Voices

From *The Buddhist Annual of Ceylon*
Vol. III, No. 2 (1928)



A

s a profound thinker, as the most profound thinker the world has ever known, the Buddha had two ways of speaking to people. At one time he would address them in words that expressed the utmost depth of his knowledge. At other times he would tell them simple things within the compass of their ready understanding, in words that were taken from the ordinary speech used among themselves. In both modes of speech, he spoke what was true. But in the former mode he spoke what was final, ultimate truth and fact; in the latter mode, what was true for the people and the time to and in which he spoke.

The *anattā*-doctrine is a specimen of the former mode of speech. Here, speaking what is finally and ultimately true, the Buddha said that there are in the universe no entities anywhere, neither in mind nor in matter. He said that all seeming entities, whether material or mental, are only momentary expressions of

energy, varying from moment to moment, never constant, ever changing, somewhat as an electric bulb light is not a fixed entity but an ever-renewed, from-moment-to-moment maintained display of electric energy. This is a scientific fact, or is well on the way to be demonstrated so. It has long been a philosopher's belief when philosophers have turned their minds to the consideration of what so-called "matter" really is. When they have done so, when they have analysed the data on which is founded the common belief in any solid entity made of what is called "matter," they have found that the only evidence for its existence is that of our senses, and of the deductions drawn therefrom. Principally the latter; and upon close consideration indeed, have found that it is wholly the latter.

We receive various sense-impressions through all our various senses, and from these deduce the existence of something which originates these impressions, which sends them to our senses. But on close analysis, we find that this is a pure deduction, a simple inference, and nothing else. All we are quite sure about is the impression on our senses, but of nothing more. But what makes an impression on our senses is an energy, a force. Hence all we can be sure about is that we have around us all the time a variety of forces or energies playing upon us, and that these,

in sum, make up what we call the universe. Hence, when people came to the Buddha, as they did, and asked him: "Is the world limited or is it limitless? Is the world eternal or is it not eternal?," the Buddha had nothing to say to them in reply. Why not? Was it, as some prejudiced critics who ought to know better have suggested, and in fact have plainly said, because "he did not know"? Indeed it was not. The Buddha here simply followed the age-old method of the polite East in abstaining from calling attention to the ignorance of his interlocutor which made him ask such a question, by simply saying nothing. For, in asking such a question, the questioner assumed, implied, took for granted, something which the Buddha, as a profound thinker, as the profoundest thinker in the world at that time or any time before or since, did not admit, namely, that there was then in existence a "world," in the sense in which his questioner used the word, as a definite concrete entity. The questioner was asking a question about ultimate truth and fact: and since in ultimate truth and fact, the Buddha did not recognise the existence of such a "world" as his questioner was assuming to exist when he put the question, the Buddha could do nothing but keep silence. And the questioner of those days knew quite well what that silence meant, even if some of our modern critics do not know, or pretend not to know.

He knew that what the Buddha was saying by that silence was this: "You ask a foolish question which you have no right to ask, for you ask me about the history of something which now, at this moment does not exist, for me, in truth and fact. How then can I say anything about whether it is limitless or eternal or anything else, any more than I can tell you if the third horn of a buffalo is limitless or eternal. There is no third horn of a buffalo. But I forbear from putting you to shame before all these listeners around by pointing out to you that simple fact which, as a pretended enquirer after ultimate truth and fact, you ought to know; and so I preserve a silence that is only meant to be kind."

When, however, the Buddha is asked a question about the world which is not concerned with ultimate truth and fact, but with practical every-day life, as lived at the moment by the person asking him the question, then he says: "There is a world, and you have a good deal to do in order to find your proper place therein, and make proper use of your stay there. There is a world; and there is a beyond-the-world; and I have to show you how you may make your way from the one to the other."

But this world the Buddha believes in and deals with—and with no other kind of world does he deal—is the world of men's feelings and perceptions and

mentations and consciousnesses, the world that is immediately present to every mother's son of us, the world that none of us, even the most sceptical, can ever possibly doubt, the world that is contained within this "fathom-long mortal frame," our body. Here is the world the Buddha knows of and tells about; and it is the real world, in contradistinction to that other world supposed to lie outside us, as sole proof of whose existence we have nothing but deduction and inference. With this real world within us the Buddha deals in the most comprehensive and minute fashion in a psychology which makes most of what passes for that science in the West seem mere childish groping and fumbling. He shows how to deal with every one of its phases and permutations with a detail that might take the most diligent student of its intricacies all his life to master, and even then have still something to learn. But the main purpose of all that minute tabulation is quite easily grasped. As said, it is simply a method of bringing that world to an end, and allowing to supervene that other state which takes its place when place is made for it, Nibbāna. This Nibbāna is not caused, not originated, does not have any beginning. It simply makes its presence known when all that is opposed to it is removed. And what is opposed to its manifestation is the whole complex congeries of feelings and emotions and thinkings

which make up that world, a human being. These removed, without anything further, Nibbāna is present. And that is the end of all evolution, the topmost height to which man can reach. With the ceasing of all self-referred feelings and thinkings and imaginings and consciousnesses, there goes on a life that is lived as a result only of past causes set in motion, like a top to which no further spinning motion is imparted, but still keeps on spinning only from the motion already given it in the past. And when that motion is all exhausted, then comes the real “death,” the ceasing of all these externally perceptible feelings, and so on, in a sense-perceptible physical body; and the secret of what lies beyond remains a secret, and must always remain one, to those who still remain on this hither side of that mystery. By the very fact of our position in this world, doing all our thinking with brains belonging to this world— since, what other brains have we got to think with?—it is quite impossible to state what that ultimate state, Nibbāna is, in words of this world.

Some, indeed, attempted to find out from the Buddha himself. They enquired, in their artless innocence—artless and innocent of the tremendous difference between the Conditioned and the Unconditioned—“Does the Arahant exist after death? Or does he not exist?” And just as to the artless and

innocent question regarding the existence of the world implied in the questions as to its limitlessness and eternity, so here also the Buddha replied with kindly silence. He forbore to expose to shame the ignorance of his interlocutor by pointing out that even now there is no actual Arahant in the sense in which the questioner assumed there was one, but only a series of manifestations of *kamma*-energy, displaying themselves from moment to moment to our physical senses and that to ask after what happens after death to something that does not exist now is simply a display of miscomprehension which a kindly person can only treat with kindly silence, such as any decent person practises when some blunderer commits a bad faux pas in conversation, in a company.

For, to come to a thinker like the Buddha and ask such a question after he had been going about for years trying to let men see that in ultimate truth and fact—in which alone he was interested, and which he sought to impart to as many as were ripe to learn it of him—there are no entities called men, but only manifestations of *kamma*-energy, was something so stupid that in any one lesser than a Buddha, it would have been excusable if he burst out into annoyed protest at it, and at its propounder.

But this truth that there are no entities called men, it is well to note, is an ultimate, final truth, spoken to

thinkers and analysts and philosophers. When speaking to common men, the Buddha said: "There is such an entity as a man. You all know it and feel it. And I know it and feel it with you. You are not the same man that you were ten years ago: and yet you are not another man. You are not me. I am not you. What that man of ten years ago was, makes the man you are today just what he is, and not otherwise. And going still further back than ten years of this present lifetime of yours, what you are ten hundred years ago you are not today, and yet you are not another person altogether. What you were ten hundred years ago makes you what you are today, just as you are, so, not otherwise, distant from me and from others around you. And further—and take good heed of this!—what you are today will go to make you what you will be ten years after this, and ten hundred years after this. There is no break in the stream of *kamma*causation anywhere. There is no break between the man of this moment and the man of ten minutes, or ten months, or ten years, or of ten lifetimes ago. It is all one unbroken chain of happening. And all my teaching is to show you how to bring to an end all happening, to produce the one sole real break there ever is in this chain of *kamma*causation, the break which is its final break, its final ceasing, Nibbāna. This last is the only real death there is. What is ordinarily called death is only a

passing on to another state in this or some other world. It is not a ceasing, but only a change. But what I would teach you, is how to arrive at the ceasing of all this change, and the final, ultimate attainment of the Changeless.”

Thus the Buddha has two voices. When speaking to philosophers and thinkers, he says there is no world, in the vulgar acceptance of the world. But when speaking to the common man of every-day life, he says: “There is a world, and you have to find deliverance from it; and I will show you how.” When speaking to philosophers and thinkers he says there is no such entity as a man. But when speaking to the ordinary every-day person, he says: “There is a man; and you, that man, have to gain freedom from that world.”

How resolve these antimonies? In the only way in which all antimonies of thought have to be resolved—by action. The end of man is not a thought but a deed, as was said years ago by the Western philosopher, Goethe, and after him by Carlyle. And so was said the Buddha, in effect, twenty-five hundred of years before them, in another era and on another continent, Asia, the old mother-continent of all wisdom and knowledge of higher and deeper things. His teaching is the teaching of a Way, of a deed, of a doing. In the following of that Way or Method or Path lies the

solution of all the seeming contradictions of the thought, or expression of thought, by which he accompanied his teaching of his Way. Thus the final lesson of Buddhism, its only lesson ultimately, is: Follow the Way, Tread the Path. Everything else is subsidiary to that, leads to that, or, leads to nothing, but a wild waste of warring words, in which men may flounder for ever as in the morass. But out of that jungle, that thicket, that snare, that jungle of words and opinions and views they may, if they will, find a way on to firm ground, the firm ground of the Noble Eightfold Path shown by him, a Path that leads to that other firm solid ground, the ultimate, highest end open to him, complete deliverance from the very possibility of views and opinions, in the attainment of the one final, ultimate certainty, Nibbāna.

A Buddhist Sermonette

From *The Buddhist Annual of Ceylon*
Volume III, No. 1 (1927)

“Verily not by hatred do hatreds cease here

ever; by non-hatred do they cease; this is the eternal law of things.”

So runs one of the best known and most widely quoted texts in the Dhammapada, rendered in English that exactly follows the Pali word for word, except for the addition of the two words “of things” at the end, an addition made in order to bring out the meaning of “Dhamma” as something not made or invented by men, but inherent in the universe, in things as they are.

We use these words “universe” and “things” because they are terms of current speech, and there are no others available to express more nearly what we mean; but in the Buddhist way of envisaging life there is no “universe” and no “things” in the sense in which these words are ordinarily used. For the Buddhist way of envisaging what is here is one that is not satisfied to skim surfaces, but goes into things, penetrates them, and seeks to find out what they are at the bottom. In so doing, Buddhism finds that the primary reality is thinking; that the world is not a world of things, but a world of thinkings, of thinkings that for us have got themselves externalised and solidified into so-called “things.” Hence the problem of “how to make the world better” hardly troubles the Buddhist. All he troubles about is how to make his thinking, and the

thinking of others, better; and then the “world” will become better of itself, without any need to trouble about it.

It makes a Buddhist melancholy sometimes—he cannot help it—to see numbers of excellent, well-meaning people running around in the world, all fussily engaged in “doing good,” as they think, and all unwittingly doing a great deal of harm. If only they would sit down quietly sometimes, and try to “think good” and teach others to “think good,” they would come much nearer to actually helping the world than they do with their present activities. The most that can be said for these busy-bodies is that they do themselves some good by these expressions of the goodwill that is in them; but that they do others all the good they imagine they are doing them, is very, very doubtful indeed, notwithstanding all their goodwill and earnestness.

If the apples in an orchard are unpleasant, small, sour and hard, and not what the gardener or anybody else wants, the gardener does not go around the trees with a paint brush in his hand and paint all the small green fruits a pretty pink to make them look well. In fact, he does not trouble about the apples at all in his designs for improving his orchard. What he thinks about is the trees, from which the apples grow. And if he is seriously determined to have a better crop of

apples, he resolves to change his trees. When he has done that he knows that he does not need to think about the apples. With better trees, better apples will follow, surely, inevitably, because they must, because they cannot help it.

With regard to this big orchard of the world, the Buddhist is in the position of any sensible orchard gardener. He thinks about the trees in the world orchard, and these trees are thinkings, thoughts. With these mended, everything is mended. With these not mended, nothing is mended, no matter how prettily you paint them and try to pretend that, in vulgar phrase, "everything in the garden is lovely."

Now what is the ugliest tree that grows in the world-orchard, producing the ugliest, most poisonous fruit? Surely it is the tree of hate, of hating thought. Could anything be uglier, more repulsive than the words and deeds that spring from hating thought and poison and darken the world? Great is the need, then, to change these all too plentiful trees of hating thought into their opposite, into trees of non-hatred. For "non-hatred" as Buddhists use the word, is the opposite of hatred. It is not simply a negative term of neutral import. As the word "untruth" in English conveys the positive meaning of "lie" to anyone who hears it; or the word "uncertain" the positive meaning of "doubtful," so the Pali word *averenaw* which we have

here translated as “by non-hatred,” conveys to a Buddhist’s mind the opposite, positive meaning of “by love,” that is, by *metta*. Hatred, then, according to our text, never ceases by hatred, by hating back; it ceases only by love.

And the business of a Buddhist in the world is to bring about the ceasing of hatred (and other undesirable ways of thinking). It is not his own gratification he is to think of, like the satisfaction which some people get out of hating back the person who has shown hate towards them. His business is to abolish, to wipe out, to neutralise, to destroy, a hating thought directed towards himself which he finds in the world, and to not add another hating thought of his own to it, and thus make two hating thoughts in the world where before there was only one. And the only effective way of doing this is to send forth a thought of love to meet the thought of hate, and so to cancel it and wipe it out of the *kamma* account book of the world.

But what is this love, a thought of which will cancel out a thought of hate? Is it what is usually called love? Far from it! Love as it is usually spoken of is mostly *kāma*, a burning flame that seeks to get something for itself, which wants to devour and eat up, to feed itself. But Buddhist love is *metta*, an altogether different thing. We do not say, as one grievously mistaken

translator of this very book from which our present text is taken, makes a certain passage in it say: "By love comes sorrow, by love comes fear. He that is without love is without sorrow and fear." What we say is: "By lust comes sorrow, by lust comes fear. He that is free from lust is free from sorrow and fear," which, like every word that comes from the Exalted One's mouth, is an indisputably true statement, as indisputably true as that other is indisputably false.

Accordingly we are instructed how we may beget in ourselves thoughts of *metta*, of love, of real love, such as a mother has for her child. A mother never wants anything back from her child in return for all that she does for it. All she asks is to be allowed to do something for it, to give it something, anything at all that she has, any service at all that she can render; and whether it pays her back for it or not, she does not care, does not even think about. So we have to learn to practice *metta* towards others, and with *metta*, with love, to wipe out and cancel hate. But how?

Well, the first thing is to think of someone whom we love selflessly, with some approach to *metta*, to real love, free from all self-seeking of any kind. When we think of such a one, we do not find it difficult to hold a thought of *metta* towards them in our mind. Indeed, we find it fairly easy, for it is already with us a habitual, natural thing to do. And now, having dwelt

on this *metta* thought long enough and steadily enough to make it strong in our minds, we now have to think of another person who is further away from us in our thoughts, one for whom we have not so strong a natural liking or love as we have for the first person we have been thinking of in our practice of *metta*. And of this second person we now must think steadily and strongly, until we have produced in our minds as strong a feeling or thought of *metta* or love towards him as we had towards the first person with whom we began this practice of *metta* or loving thought. And now, having done this successfully, we next turn our thought or feeling of *metta* on to some other third person we know still further removed from our natural, ordinary feelings of affection that the first and second persons towards whom we have been directing our thoughts of *metta*, until, towards this third person also, we have begotten in our minds feelings and thoughts of *metta* as strong and sincere as those felt towards the first two persons. Thus on and on we go, spreading our thoughts a little further and further away towards others, towards whom we naturally feel rather indifferent, until at last, with this practice, our thoughts of *metta*, from being a mere thin stream, have become a broad flood. We are able, or we ought to be able, to direct them and maintain them active in full tide, towards some person or persons

against whom we usually have feelings of dislike, perhaps even, of active hate, of desire to injure and hurt. This is the full triumph of the practice of *metta*-thought, its complete victory. When we are able thus to feel love, *metta*, even to those who have injured us, we are acting on the principle expressed in our text; now we are actually putting into effect the only true alchemy there is in the world—the turning of hatred into love, the dull dross of hate into the bright gold of affection. Now we are making the practical proof that hatred never ceases by hatred, that it ceases only by love—the old, the never-failing, the eternal law of things.

This practice of *metta*-thought is called a Brahma-vihāra, a dwelling with Brahma, a dwelling with the highest god, and that is indeed what it is. To be a god is to be able to create good, and here in this practice, if we practise it successfully, we create gold, the richest metal in the world, the gold of love. But it is in the power of the gods also to destroy. And the man who practises *metta* becomes thereby also a destroyer, a destroyer of the ugliest, the most unbeautiful thing there is in the world—hatred, enmity, ill-will.

Thus, by the practice of *mettā*-thought as taught by the Buddha, a man becomes an equal of the gods, a creator and a destroyer of the most beneficent kind—a creator of good and a destroyer of evil. Such a one,

after death, must surely go to the realms of the gods to be one of them, to be one of the beneficent forces of the world, sending down showers of blessings from his loftier seat to those on lower levels. And then, when the good doing that has brought him so happy a lot, has exhausted its course, he will be born again on the lower levels, not as one condemned to unhappiness, but as one happy in himself, whatever the wealth, or lack of wealth, the fame or lack of fame, the high position or lack of it he may have to enjoy or endure in the world of the *kāma-loka*. For love makes happy, now, and in the future and always. It makes happy him who gives it and him who receives it. May we all seek this one sure way to be happy, and to make others happy—the way of love that makes hatreds cease because they cannot live in love's pure atmosphere, but must wither away and die. May all beings be happy; May all beings learn to love! For when all beings love, then will all beings be happy.

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